PUBLIC LIBRARIES INDEX TO VOLUME 43 2004

PREPARED BY
JANET RUSSELL

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Librarians Win RIF's Top Volunteer Honors

Reading Is Fundamental, the nation's largest and oldest nonprofit children's and family literacy organization, named three former librarians as regional winners of the 2004 Anne Richardson RIF Volunteers of the Year, presented by Nestlé USA. Anitra Gordon of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Ida W. Thompson of Columbia, South Carolina, and Jill Walker of Watsonville, Calififoria, accepted the awards in June 2004 at a RIF board reception in Washington, D.C.

For more than a quarter of a century, Gordon, Thompson, and Walker have actively sought to extend RIF's literacy programs to countless elementary and high school students. With the common goal of helping children develop a love for reading, all three women have combined RIF book distributions with other library and literacy activities, ultimately expanding student access to—and interest in—books. "Students are so enthusiastic for having the opportunity to select their own book," Thompson said. "Schools are prescriptive; they tell children which textbooks and reading lists to read. But with RIF they're free. They can come and choose whatever they want to read, and I think that's really the magic of it."

Gordon and Walker, both recent retirees, have each served as RIF volunteers for twenty-six years. Gordon's relentless fundraising efforts at Lincoln High School in Ypsilanti, Michigan, have led to three yearly book distributions as well as an additional distribution of four thousand books a year. Walker, who helped grow her RIF program at Amesti Elementary School in Watsonville to serve fourteen sites in the community, often dressed as a colorful costumed character at book distributions to spread the message that reading is important. Similarly, Thompson, a former librarian and current school district administrator, has come up with her own creative ideas. Her development and organization of the current annual RIF Rocks community fair event for Richland County School District One in Columbia attracted one thousand participants in the first year alone and continues to grow.

Whatever the method used to draw the students in, all three women agree that RIF can serve as a valuable way to excite more students about books. "I saw RIF as a way to present students with books they would want to read, books they helped select, books on topics they never thought about but which interested them when they saw the book on the table," Gordon said. "Once you start a RIF program, you get the layering effect of giving children books repeatedly and families receiving books repeatedly," Walker said. "For many children, it's their first and only opportunity to start a library."

Made possible this year by a donation from Nestlé USA, the annual Anne Richardson RIF Volunteer of the Year Award honors extraordinary RIF volunteers across the country and pays tribute to the late Anne Hazard Richardson, who served as RIF's chair from 1981 to 1996. An independent panel of judges selects one winner from each RIF region.

For more information and to access reading resources, visit RIF's Web site at www.rif.org.